

critical digest

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MURKIN

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New York Theatre Diary

School for Murder- Upstairs Theatre, 1639 Broadway 4/30/54. Three Grand Guignol plays by Nicholas Bela and Irving Strouse with Helena Carroll and Paul Bruce... Show Boat-City Center 5/5/54 First of 3 productions of the NYC Light Opera Company. Directed by William Hammerstein with Robert Rounseville, Burl Ives, Jo Sullivan... The Seagull Phoenix 5/11/54. Fourth and final production of season. Norris Houghton directing, with Montgomery Clift, Judith Evelyn, Kevin McCarthy... The Pajama Game- St James 5/13 Brisson-Griffith-Prince present musical comedy version of Richard Bissell's novel "7½ Cents." With John Raitt, Janis Paige, Eddie Foy, Jr.

Current Theatre Reviews

Now You See It- Longacre- 4/19/54- 4/24/54. Milbourne Christopher's one man magic show is not for drama critics. Most theatre reviewers who covered the proceedings included in the three acts and 33 tricks. Most agreed magician was just about perfect, but they questioned the length and sameness of the long program. Atkinson, Times, admitted it would take a magician, not a drama critic, to find fault with the gentleman. Critic also suggested that Christopher might be useful to the US government and its foreign policy, providing the element of magic to same. Kerr, Herald Tribune, found show had too much to say and too little to see. Chapman, News, recommended show for magicians only. As an amateur magician Coleman Mirror, was disappointed at the lack of scintillating manipulations in the program. Lacks showmanship, summed up McClain, Journal American. While Hawkins, World Telegram & Sun, wished that he would grow a little more flamboyant and play the whole show with more vitality. Evening might interest youngsters, rates Rice, Post, but he feared it might wear down the old man unless he is a parlor entertainer at neighborhood gatherings.

Off Broadway Current Reviews- more on Page 2

Hamlet- Jan Hus 4/19/54. Trio of mild "pro" notices filed in favor of the Shakespeare Guild Festival Company production at 351 E 74. Funke, Times, Watts, Post and Dash, Women's Wear, all recommended it as a serviceable production presented on a tiny stage, and each listed several minor complaints. Times drama editor noted that the actors, for the most part, lacked depth in the characterizations. They are more dependent upon gesture and grimace, he stated, than the needed interior feeling. Funke rated Raymond Johnson as the best in the cast. Watts, Post, did agree with the Times man that Herbert Kramer's direction was on the whole lively and intelligently managed. Post critic also found some of the cast unprofessional, but rated William Thornton, as Hamlet, and Johnson as among the best in a sound and interesting production. Though Dash, Women's Wear, also noticed a lack of finish to satisfy layman patrons, he recommended the production as one supercharged with power.

Hits Revisited

Rosalind Russell won 100% rave notices from the critics for her portrayal in Wonderful Town, and Carol Channing seems to be destined to do the same. Chapman, News, and Watts, Post, are the latest to join the critical bandwagon in her favor.

! Off Broadway !

Anthony Parella has postponed the opening of his arena production of Indoor Sport at Diamond Horsecollar of Hotel Parc Hotel until the week after Labor Day. . . . Philip Barry's Here Comes the Groom will be presented May 4 by Theatre Album of Cherry Lane. Stephen Bates will stage the play. . . . Theatrep are Festival Company have agreed to operate at Jan Hus House under modified union conditions. . . . Equity Library presents Thunder on the Left April 28-May 2.

No Legal Grounds, Originals Only new production, didn't impress either Kerner, Women's Wear, or Greenberg. Show Business as a very good comedy. Construction of script and quality of direction and acting were both panned.

Electra, the US first production of Giraudoux' comedy presented by the Playhouse Actors Company at the Henry St. Playhouse, drew 2 diverse reports. Hawkings, World Telegram & Sun, marked it as a strikingly beautiful production, and a well spoken one. But Greenberg, Show Business, feared it was nothing more than a tiresome debate about Truth. Both admitted play needed more mature cast. Gerald McGonagill was praised by both.

Tin Waltz, Nat Harris' new play presented by Actors & Writers Theatre at St. Clements Church, was panned by Funke, Times. Drama editor blamed author for providing an unresolved piece of work. He skipped cast credits on purpose. . . . Sound of Hunting, presented by Trio Productions at Cherry Lane, seems trite and not fully effective, rates Frank, Women's Wear. . . . Don Juan in Russian Manner, a new version of Chekhov's "That Worthless Fellow Platonev" presented by Barnard College's Wigs and Cues, won the mild approval of Atkinson, Times. Performance by college students, he commented, was more illuminating than you might suppose. Play presents interesting aspect of author's early career.

Tune WNBC (NYC) Ben Grauer 7 30 AM day after openings for "CD" quotes reviews. Tune WNYC (NYC) Around NYC on Thur 8 AM for "Off Broadway Round Up" by "CD."

! Theatre TV & Radio Notes !

WNYC Shakespeare Festival devoted 30 hours of programming to plays, lectures and discussions. 6 lectures by Dr. Wm. Empson, Professor of English at University of Sheffield, England.

"The World of Tallulah Bankhead" TV series being planned by ABC TV for next fall. . . . Edith Adams, Wonderful Town, will appear on WABD late evening show with Ernie Kovacs. . . . Disc Jockeys given permission by Columbia Records to play entire Girl in Pink Tights album. . . . NBC may not present the 2 completed Robert E Sherwood TV scripts this season.

! Theatre Book Comments !

"Around Theatres", a one volume edition of Max Beerbohm's dramatic criticisms published by Simon & Schuster, was recommended by Chapman, News, and Down, Variety. Latter noted it is good to have this handy, if bulky, reissue. News drama critic believes book points up moral that nobody likes a drama critic until he has died or retired. When one of these happy things happens people, Chapman notes, begin to rejoice and remember what a wonderful fellow he was.

! Vaudeville !

Palace stage show features Bert Howell and Frank Radcliffe and Tommy Hanlin.

! "CD" Gift Coupon !

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' Green Room Department '
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FIRE HEAD ANSWERS... Edward Cavanaugh, jr., Fire Commissioner of NYC, defended his department's actions against 3 off Broadway producers at the April meeting of "Drama Desk." He detailed to the theatre reporters the proper procedure for obtaining theatre and cabaret licenses, exactly where and how to get them, and the reasons for his entire fire prevention campaign. The responsibility of his job is to enforce all the laws relating to fire and panic. Finally, he concluded, the off Broadway producers could consider themselves lucky that no fire or accident had taken place on their properties. If it had they would have been guilty of manslaughter or assault.

CRITICAL THOUGHTS... The Magic and the Loss is so fine a play, comments NBC Leon Pearson, that it is having a struggle on Broadway...There is a definite scarcity of "name" players available for summer theatre packages, notes Morehouse, World Telegram & Sun...NY drama critics are virtual geniuses of perception and style compared to their Los Angeles colleagues, states Watts, Post.

SILLY SEASON BLOOMS... The award season, or what some call the silly season, is now in full bloom, reports Sheaffer, Eagle. Silly because by the time it has run its course there will hardly be a show and performer in town that won't have been cited by some organization or other as "best" or "outstanding" or "distinguished" or something. Theatre minded groups, critic continues, go into their little secret huddles and come out with announcements of their choices. Hotel luncheons are scheduled where the leading features will be chicken, speeches, the presentation of plaques, scrolls, etc, followed by expressions of heartfelt gratitude.

COLUMN TIPS... NY producer having trouble getting passport for top director he wants to stage London production of his show, whispers Walker...Hope Holiday of Jones Beach's Arabian Nights will finish the summer a star, predicts Winchell...Amphitryon 38 production presented by group of radio-TV actors acting as their own angels, notes Kilgallen.

"CON" MAJESTIC... Times reader suggests via "Drama Mailbag" that a new prize, a "Billy" be awarded by playgoers to that theatre which has thought up the most ingenious way to harass the audience. First candidate is Majestic where at fourth performance of By the Beautiful Sea were only one program was provided for every two persons.

INTERVIEW HI-LITES... Wm and Jean Eckharts, Golden Apple set designers, believe that the designer should surround the actors with elements they can relate to, but not be encumbered by, they told Rice, Post.

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' Pros & Cons by TMK '
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Pity the dilemma of the drama critic assigned to an off Broadway play that turns out to be a "stinker." If he writes a soft-kind notice encouraging the group, and encouraging readers to see the show, the readers have a perfect right in feeling they have been mislead. If he writes what he really thinks of the poor show, the group, which may contain some worthwhile talent, will probably die.. And if he decides it is kinder to not write any review at all, who can blame him.

Electra, presented in the handsome and slightly inconvenient Henry St Playhouse, is a workmanlike production of an early Giraudoux' script. The second half includes several 15 minute monologues that tend to make the play ridiculous...Tin Waltz is a dull attempt at a social comedy that is neither important nor funny...Rope cast and staff deserve a prize for theatrical fortitude. Cast presents convincing version, though direction is on the weak side.

Two off Broadway theatre producers received suspended sentences in Municipal Term court. Ted Mann-co-producer of Circle in the Square and Ed Strum, producer of Club Theatre's The Infernal Machine both pleaded guilty to fire law violations at their theatres. Magistrate Alexander Del Giorno said that the theatres would remain closed until the fire hazards had been removed and the owners of the property had obtained permits to reopen them. William Gass' production of Rope, which had been advised by the Fire Dept. not to open at the uptown Gellandre Studios opened this week at the Open Door 55 W 3rd.

Plays

Milbourne Christopher's one man magic show, Now You See It, closed at Longacre after 8 performances...The Golden Apple moved up to the Alvin...Old Vic will present Midsummer Night's Dream at Metropolitan Opera House Sept 21-Oct 11 and Oct 15-17 under sponsorship of Sol Hurok...Clinton Wilder will present Max Shulman and Robert Paul Smith's new comedy The Tender Trap in October.

People

Estimated NYC attendance at 30 shows, on and off Broadway, by "CD" this week is 210,000...Barry Sullivan it is reported will replace Henry Fonda in Caine Mutiny May 29...Edith Meiser leaves The Magic and the Loss to replace Luella Gear in Sabrina Fair...League of NY Theatres tabled the resignation of J J Shubert.

Award Dept.

David Wayne, Teahouse of the August Moon, named winner of the 1954 Barter Theatre Award...Josephine Hull, Solid Gold Cadillac, won Drama League of NY Della Australian Award...Caine Mutiny picked as best play of year by "Outer Circle"...John Houseman, direction of Coriolanus, won Shakespeare Club of NY Theatre Award.

Other Broadways

Time Out for Ginger company in Chicago playing a Housewife's matinee on Wednesdays at 2 PM and also a Tuesday evening performance at 7 30 PM...Princess Margaret is understudying the role of a dance hall hostess for a London charity production of Edgar Wallace's The Frog...Two Soviet playwrights, both winners of the Stalin prize, have been rebuked by critics. Anatoly Surov is accused of habitual drunkenness and repeated boorish conduct in public, while Nikolai Virta is charged with conducting himself as a pre-Revolutionary Russian nobleman. Both have written anti-Western plays.

Theatre Film Notes

Tennessee Williams' The Rose Tattoo will be shot with Anna Magnani on the Gulf of Mexico...Pearl Bailey will play the role of Frankie in Otto Preminger's film version of Carmen Jones...Sabrina Fair film title shortened to Sabrina by Paramount.

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